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ABSTRACT

Careful management of a testing program can greatly limit a teacher's opportunity to cheat while administering standardized tests to students and can increase the likelihood that such cheating will be detected. The Austin Independent School District's systemwide testing staff's plan for controlling cheating has three basic premises: (1) plan and organize for security by reducing the opportunities available for cheating; (2) look everywhere for clues and discrepancies; and (3) follow up swiftly on violations to let the school personnel know how seriously cheating is viewed. The following are included as attachments: the "Profile of a Teacher Who Cheats on Standardized Tests"--a composite that in some ways contradicts usual perceptions; six brief case studies of cheating in the Austin Independent School District; and "Guidelines for Test Administrator." (PN)

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OPPORTUNITY KNOCKED OUT:
REDUCING CHEATING BY TEACHERS ON STUDENT TESTS

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(Listed as "Formalizing Test-Taking Procedures to Minimize Potential Cheating Situations" in 1985 AERA Annual Meeting Program)

Teachers cheat when they administer standardized tests to students. Not all teachers, not even very many of them; but enough to make cheating a major concern for all of us who use test data for decision making. To be specific, teachers cheat to benefit their students, less often to benefit themselves.

As an administrator responsible for a large-scale testing program, I have had to face annually the issue of teachers' cheating. Experience has taught me that reacting to cheating is much less effective than preventing it, and totally preventing it is impossible. However, careful management of a testing program can greatly limit a teacher's opportunity to cheat and increase the likelihood that cheating will be detected.

We should dispel the notion that teachers who cheat are always self-centered persons who are protecting their jobs. In fact, the great majority of the teachers I have dealt with for cheating have been above-average teachers with a strong sympathy for their students' "fragile self-concepts" and a keen desire to improve their students' opportunities for success. The "Profile of a Teacher Who Cheats on Standaradized Tests" pulls together a composite that in some ways contradicts our usual perceptions. (See Attachment A.)

A major contributor to teacher cheating is a failure on the part of the teacher to accept the legitimacy of the test. There are several consequences of this failure. Many teachers may be lax in preparing students for standardized tests or in following standardized administration procedures; a few go so far as to subvert the integrity of the test by cheating. As college professors caution student teachers to avoid stereo-typing students by a single test score and teacher organizations degrade tests as inadequate measures of student learning (a.k.a. teacher effectiveness), it becomes especially important for administrators of testing programs to communicate to teachers the nature and use of the test, the rationale for the test, and even the sanctions for straying from the standardized administration procedures.

For additional context, some brief case studies of cheating in our school district have been included in Attachment B.

Our school district's systemwide testing staff's plan for controlling cheating has three basic premises.

1. Plan and organize for security.
2. Look everywhere for clues indicating irregularities.
3. Act swiftly on violations.

Plan and Organize for Security

The key to limiting cheating by teachers is to reduce the opportunities available for cheating. When our school system adopted a new achievement test battery in 1979, security was a priority from the moment we chose the test.

The basic elements to our security system are as follows.

1. University libraries have been contacted for agreements to place copies of achievement tests only in reference rooms without copy machines and not to allow them to be checked out.
2. Personal or school copies of currently adopted tests were collected and purchased from the previous owners (e.g., principals, counselors, teachers, etc.).
3. Publishers were requested to restrict all orders for test materials to the District testing office and to refer all other orders to that office.
4. Copies of the test for review were limited to District supervisory and administrative staff and were returned as soon as possible to the District's testing office. Review copies for teachers were placed only in the District's testing office with these restrictions.
    - No copies can be made.
    - No notes can be taken.
    - Only alternate forms not given in the District are available for information.
5. Test booklets are inventoried before and after each administration. Booklets stay on campuses as few days as possible and are under the control of a designated building test coordinator.

6. Teachers and other test administrators are each provided a copy of "Guidelines for Test Administrators." (See Attachment C.) Thus, everyone is put on notice as to what they must do, may do and must not do with standardized testing. These guidelines are based on School Board policy. A recent incident has taught us that our policy does not prohibit the possession by a teacher of a copy or photocopy of a standardized test that is currently in adoption. This prohibition is worthy of consideration. In addition, we have determined that there is a need for closer communication between our District and the teacher education professors from nearby universities. We would like the need for security and the consequences of cheating on standardized tests to be a part of every teacher's tests and measurements course.

Look Everywhere for Clues

We back into most of our discoveries of cheating. Time and resources have never allowed us to establish elaborate computer checks, so we rely mainly on our staff's keen eyes for circumstances that are red flags. Some of the clues we look for are as follows.

1. An overabundance of high or low scores on a selection instrument from the same school or grade/class within a school.

2. A clustering of students with very low achievement gains who had been in the same school or grade/class the previous year when the pretest was given. (Cheating may be too subtle to detect the year it occurs, but an inflated pretest certainly gives students a disadvantage when gains are calculated the following year.)
3. Dramatic and unexpected shifts in school/grade averages.
4. Comments/confessions by students and teachers.
5. Copies of exercises developed by teachers and containing actual test items.
6. Discrepancies in the expected and actual numbers of students tested. (Teachers have been known to advise students to be absent on testing days.)

Act Swiftly on Violations

The show of concern and the swift follow-up on any red flags let the school personnel know how seriously cheating is viewed. Unfortunately, the actual sanctions for cheating in our school district have been less dramatic than the official ones. Cheating is a policy violation warranting immediate firing. In reality, no teacher has ever been fired, and only a few have ever been transferred. But the threat exists.

Our informal procedure established for pursuing suspected cheating is as follows.

1. Notify the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary or Secondary Education.
2. Confer with the Executive Director of Personnel.
3. Confer with the teacher.
4. Pursue disciplinary procedures if appropriate.
5. Retest the students, destroy original test scores, and notify the parents of the new scores if appropriate.

Conclusion

Educators generally picture one student copying answers from another's test when we discuss cheating--sharing homework, bringing notes to a testing session, stealing a copy of a test, etc., are thought of also. However, these incidents each affect fewer students than when a teacher cheats for an entire class or several groups of students. In our imperfect world, administrators of standardized testing programs must accept the responsibility for limiting a teacher's opportunity to cheat.

ATTACHMENT A

Profile of a Teacher Who Cheats on Standardized Tests

I am the teacher in room 203 and have been in the same location for ten years. In that time a number of children have been devastated by a low score on standardized tests. All year I taught these students that if they do their best and think positively, then there is nothing they cannot do and they will score high on the test. If the test were fair, that is just what would happen. But because tests are biased, or at the least unreliable, students who deserve to do well are constantly demoralized, and a year's work building up their self-concepts is destroyed. Besides, it is common knowledge that other teachers have copies of the test and teach the items during the year. Cheating is justified to give these students an even break.

In considering cheating, I looked over the test and discovered that the students really had most of the skills being measured, but there are numerous examples and vocabulary that they had not encountered before. Why not remove this hurdle by slipping those examples and words into a few lessons? During the test, some students were missing items they really should be getting right. A few comments (i.e., "Now, Johnny, look at number 15; is that the answer you really want to mark?"; "Class, remember the drill we had on subject-verb agreement.") were necessary to allow the students to demonstrate their true abilities rather than to lose points because of the tricky wording of items.

When the test scores arrived, I saw excellent results that were sure to motivate the children to continue their improvement. After all, nothing promotes success like a little success.

NOTE: This is a composite profile representing some of the comments made by several teachers who have cheated on their students' standardized tests.

ATTACHMENT B

Case Studies

#1. Most of the elementary students qualifying based on an achievement test score for the special science program were from the same teacher's classroom. Students told the principal that they had been given copies of the test for homework the week before testing. The teacher was transferred to another elementary school.

#2. The evaluation of summer school examined achievement gains and noted a number of students in one grade actually lost ground in grade equivalents over a year. Follow-up revealed most of these students were in the same school and the same classroom the previous year. The same pattern of achievement losses were found for other former students of this teacher. All students at the grade level were retested and special monitors sat in on the most recent testing. No formal action has been taken with this Teacher of the Year honoree.

#3. The District's lowest achieving school became the highest achieving school at one grade level in a single year's time. Two well-established teachers were suspected of reading the students the answers and of changing answers on answer sheets. The providing of answers was confirmed by a "nonreader" who transferred to another school and was ineligible for compensatory instruction because of a 98th percentile score. A check of answer sheets revealed many times the normal level of erasures. The teachers filed a grievance with the district and state education agency, effectively blocking any action. One teacher has retired, and the other transferred to another school.

#4 An Office of Research and Evaluation tester noticed that students in one class were studying a vocabulary exercise prior to taking their graduation competency exam. After testing, a copy of the exercise was picked up from the floor and compared to the test. All vocabulary words on both forms of the competency test had been printed by the teacher for the students. The principal intervened on behalf of the teacher and only a letter of censure was placed in the teacher's file.

#5. A student complained that the test was silly because she had already studied the content. The counselor was skeptical until the student cited some specific examples. Her mother was a teacher who had given a copy of the test to the student. This case is still pending resolution.

#6. A counselor confided that special education students and other low achievers were advised by teachers to stay at home on testing days. No follow-up with individuals occurred, but testing rates are now monitored.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Office of Research and Evaluation

GUIDELINES FOR TEST ADMINISTRATORS

BEFORE THE TEST

DO	OPTIONAL	DO NOT
• Study this chart. • Study and follow precisely all the guidelines and directions for preparing students for testing and administering the tests. • Present to students all information provided in the Packet for the Preparation of Students for the ITBS. • Give students the AISD practice test according to the specified procedures. • After the practice test, answer any questions, reassure students, and briefly review the testwiseness tips. • Communicate to the students a positive attitude toward the test. • Emphasize that: (1) Students will receive their scores on the standardized test, but the scores will in no way affect their grades; (2) Students should feel free to raise their hands and ask questions if they need assistance; (3) No student is expected to answer all the questions correctly. • Remove or cover up any bulletin boards or other displays of information that would aid students in responding to test items. • Seek the advice of the Building Test Coordinator if questions or conflicts arise.	• Discuss with students positive aspects of test-taking. • Briefly discuss assertiveness in terms of asking questions re: directions; asking for something to be repeated; being sure that all your students feel comfortable asking questions or asking for your help. • Time your tests or seatwork, to get students used to working under time constraints. • Use standardized testing terminology in your regular classwork. • Make regular teacher-made tests in a multiple-choice format. • Work with students on helping them spot poor alternatives on regular teacher-made tests. • Share with students (especially third and fourth graders) some strategies to help them keep their places on the answer sheets. • (For grades 3-8) Use a separate answer sheet with regular teacher-made tests.	• Do not omit or improvise from the checklists and guidelines. • Do not spend excessive class time for testwiseness activities. • Do not teach students complex test-taking strategies. • Do not present new material or review material shortly before the test for the sole purpose of increasing test scores. • Avoid teaching students answers to actual test items. • Do not secure ITBS or any other standardized test content or items in order to develop regular teacher-made tests. • Do not encourage students to guess at random in order to improve their scores. • Do not administer another standardized test as practice within two weeks of the ITBS. • Do not administer the AISD practice test more than once. • Do not administer any other standardized practice test. • Do not discuss sanctions for low scores. • Do not lend test materials to anyone. • (Grades 3-8 only!) Do not tell students to mark in their test booklets for any reason.

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ATTACHMENT C

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DURING THE TEST

DO	OPTIONAL	DO NOT
• Be present on the testing days unless absence is absolutely unavoidable. • Communicate to the students a positive attitude toward the test. • Administer the test in the standard manner. • Test all students identified as eligible for testing by the District. • Remain in the classroom at all times unless another trained test administrator comes to provide relief. • Move around the room frequently to monitor the testing. Watch for cheating, the use of dictionaries, notes, calculators, or any other aids.		• Do not omit or improvise from the checklists, guidelines, or directions. • (For 1st and 2nd grade teachers) Do not let students fold back test booklets. • Do not provide or allow any hints as to correct answers to test questions. • Do not read exercises or pronounce words for students unless specified in test directions. • (For grades 3-8) Do not tell students to mark in the test booklets for any reason. • Do not allow the occurrence of any activity that disrupts students while testing is in progress. • Do not announce the amount of time remaining for a test. • Do not allow students to eat or drink anything at their desks. • Do not allow students to work on test sections previously taken or to be taken at a later time.

AFTER THE TEST

DO	OPTIONAL	DO NOT
• Reassure the students. • Answer general student questions. • Collect all scratch paper. • Make sure that no one has the opportunity to change student answers or otherwise falsify test responses. • Return all test booklets, manuals, scratch paper, and answer sheets to the person coordinating the testing at your school. • If you consider results for particular students to be of questionable validity, indicate this on the Special Circumstances Log. • Report any unusual circumstances to the person in charge of testing at your school.	• Discuss general areas, such as fractions.	• Do not omit or improvise from the checklists and guidelines. • Do not discuss specific test items. • Do not destroy any booklets, manuals, or answer sheets.

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